



INTERAGENCY CONNECTION

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Strategic Connections resulting in Unique Solutions

Chair's Corner



Early 2019 certainly brought some unique challenges to our federal workforce! I want to applaud the extraordinary efforts and resiliency of our

federal workforce in Houston!

Withstanding a true test of public service, we have seen the best of our federal employees and the best of our community, supporting one another through difficult times!

Now that the furloughs are behind us, the Houston FEB Policy Board is moving quickly to support the Federal agencies in our area to:

- Be prepared for the unexpected (otherwise known as emergencies, disasters...or even furloughs);
- Provide opportunities for workforce development and support; and
- Recognize the outstanding individuals and teams across Houston at our Public Service Recognition Event (scheduled for May 15, 2019).

Our **Combined Federal Campaign** was extended to February 22, 2019, this year. I hope our federal employees recognized the

support provided by their local charitable organizations and contributed generously to help others in need.

We have coordinated **MyFreeTaxes**, again, this year! This is a free, safe and easy way for individuals and households earning less than \$66,000 to e-file their federal and state taxes for free through United Way's partnership with H&R Block. It is available in all 50 states with one simple income cap, includes the federal and up to three state returns, all major forms, no age restrictions, no hidden fees, and no upsells. We care about making taxes free and less complicated in a safe and convenient online experience! Get started at:

www.oklahoma.feb.gov/MyFreeTaxesAddtlInfo.html

The **2019 Leadership FEB** class is currently in development and will be emailed to agency leaders as soon as the schedule is confirmed.

I hope you take advantage of our FEB activities, planned for your benefit!

Natalie Saiz, Chair

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Why Retirement Processing Takes So Long

The busiest time of the year for retirement claims processing at the Office of Personnel Management is fast approaching. At the end of November, OPM had an inventory of 19,162 unprocessed retirement applications. This will most likely significantly increase over the next few months, because many federal employees plan their retirements at the end of the year in order to maximize their lump sum payout of unused annual leave.

The spike in end-of-leave-year retirements presents a number of challenges for retirement processing. According to a recent [OPM inspector general report](#), the timely processing of initial retirement payments remains a challenge for the agency. OPM's 2018-2022 strategic plan sets a target of achieving an average case processing time of 60 days or less. The agency's Retirement Services unit appears to have met that goal in fiscal 2018, with an average of 59 days. But its claims backlog as of September was 17,628, more than 4.5 percent higher than at the same time a year ago.

According to the IG report, the steps Retirement Services is taking to address delays in processing include:

- Continue to integrate improvements for correspondence and claims processing.
- Enhance reporting tools to monitor and address Retirement Services workloads.
- Use overtime to assist with timely processing.
- Work with the agency's chief information officer to explore new uses of technology to help improve processing and reduce wait times.
- Provide monthly feedback to agencies and payroll offices and alert them of trends and improvement opportunities.
- Identify training needs for agencies and conduct workshops on the retirement application process.

Once your retirement application is in the hands of OPM, there's not much you can do but wait. But there are steps you can take beforehand to

help ensure the process runs as smoothly as possible:

- Double-check your application to make sure you've answered all of the questions on it. Complete your application electronically, if possible. OPM will not accept corrections in certain sections of the application form.
- Keep a copy of your completed application.
- Be sure to complete the Marital Information and Annuity Election sections of the application. That applies whether you're married, single, widowed or divorced. If you're married, be sure to include a copy of your marriage certificate with your application. If you're divorced, you only need to include a copy of your court order or divorce decree if there was a portion of your retirement or survivor annuity awarded to your former spouse.
- If you're married and your spouse is waiving their right to the maximum spousal survivor annuity, be sure to have their signature notarized on the Spouse's Consent to Survivor Election portion of the application.
- If you've performed active duty military service, be sure you've included the documentation of your service and information related to military retired pay in Schedules A and B of the application.
- Be sure to document that you've had five years of coverage under Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, especially if you were covered under your spouse's FEHBP plan or you're using coverage under TRICARE within five years of your retirement. According to an [OPM training video](#), 20 percent of all retirement errors involve not documenting five years of FEHBP coverage.

Article written by Tammy Flanagan, published at <https://www.govexec.com/pay-benefits/retirement-planning/2018/12/why-retirement-processing-takes-so-long/153529/>

What the Shutdown Means for Your Retirement

By [Tammy Flanagan](#)

Due to the ongoing partial government shutdown, more than 300,000 federal employees are currently on furlough without a guarantee of back pay. An additional 500,000 are working but facing delayed paychecks.

Because the end of the year is a popular time to retire, some employees may have spent their last days on the job in a furlough status, and may be in the dark as to how their retirement processing is coming along. This information is also very important for people who are planning to retire or who are simply wondering about their benefits while waiting out the furlough period.

The Office of Personnel Management has posted [guidance on shutdown furloughs](#) and their effect on federal benefits. It contains insights from the 2013 government shutdown. (Of course, there's no guarantee the current furlough will have the same end result as that one.)

Here are some highlights of the guidance:

- For retirement planning, a furlough period in a non-pay status is treated as a period of leave without pay. Employees receive credit for leave without pay periods up to six months in a calendar year without impacting their service credit for retirement or their high-three average salary.
- If your retirement was effective during the furlough period, you will be credited with service through your effective date of retirement as if there wasn't a furlough going on. For example, if your retirement was effective on Dec. 31, 2018, you will receive service credit through close of business that day, but not beyond the date that you chose to retire.
- Keep in mind that there may be a delay in the processing of your retirement, because the employees responsible for finalizing your retirement package at your agency may be furloughed. That means they won't be able to send your retirement application to OPM.
- Lump-sum payments for annual leave at affected agencies will be delayed until funds are available.
- If you are already receiving retirement benefits, you can make changes to your account [online](#) or by calling OPM's Retirement Services unit at 888-767-6738.
- If you are already retired, the cost-of living adjustment due on Dec. 31 was included with

your retirement payment on Jan 1.

Insurance and Other Benefits

For current employees, enrollment in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program continues for up to a year in a nonpay status, and the government continues to pay its share of the contribution. The effective date of an open season enrollment change will still be the first day of the first full pay period in January for employees (Jan. 6 for most workers) and Jan. 1 for retirees.

Coverage under the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance program continues for a year for those in a nonpay status, without cost to the employee.

Health care expenses covered under flexible spending accounts will not be reimbursed until the employee returns to a pay status. Eligible dependent care expenses incurred during the nonpay status may be reimbursed up to whatever balance is in the employee's dependent care account, as long as the expenses incurred during the nonpay status allow the employee (or employee's spouse if married) to work, look for work, or attend school full-time.

Coverage under the Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program continues as long as premiums are paid. If Long Term Care Partners, which manages the program, does not receive any premiums for three consecutive pay periods, they will begin directly billing the enrollee. Coverage under the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program will continue, but employees will get a direct bill for past due premiums if no premium is paid for two consecutive pay periods.

For information on the effect of furloughs on your Thrift Savings Plan account, see this [fact sheet](#). You can make interfund transfers of your existing account balance during the furlough period, and you may be entitled to make up contributions when you return to a pay status. You can request an in-service withdrawal if you are age 59 ½ or older or if you are experiencing a financial hardship.

The shutdown should have little effect on Social Security checks. Most Social Security offices are open, and processing of payments continues because the agency has full-year funding in place.

<https://www.govexec.com/pay-benefits/retirement-planning/2019/01/what-shutdown-means-your-retirement/153917/?oref=voices-module>

Eight Things That Set Truly Confident People Apart

Successful people often exude confidence—it's obvious that they believe in themselves and what they're doing. It isn't their success that makes them confident, however. The confidence was there first....

With proper guidance and hard work, anyone can become more confident. Embracing the following behaviors of truly confident people will help get you there.

1. They Take an Honest Look at Themselves

Johnny Unitas said, "There is a difference between conceit and confidence. Conceit is bragging about yourself. Confidence means you believe you can get the job done." In other words, confidence is *earned* through hard work, and confident people are self-aware. When your confidence exceeds your abilities, you've crossed the line into arrogance. You need to know the difference.

True confidence is firmly planted in reality. To grow your confidence, it's important to do an honest and accurate self-assessment of your abilities. If there are weaknesses in your skill set, make plans for strengthening these skills and find ways to minimize their negative impact. Ignoring your weaknesses or pretending they're strengths won't make them go away. Likewise, having a clear understanding of your strengths enables you to shake off some of the more groundless feedback and criticism you can get in a busy, competitive work environment—and that builds confidence.

2. They Don't Seek Attention

People are turned off by those who are desperate for attention. Confident people know that being yourself is much more

effective than trying to prove that you're important. People catch on to your attitude quickly and are more attracted to the right attitude than what, or how many, people you know. Confident people always seem to bring the right attitude.

Confident people are masters of attention diffusion. When they're receiving attention for an accomplishment, they quickly shift the focus to all the people who worked hard to help get them there. They don't crave approval or praise because they draw their self-worth from within.

3. They Seek Out Small Victories

Confident people tend to challenge themselves and compete, even when their efforts yield small victories. Small victories build new androgen receptors in the areas of the brain responsible for reward and motivation. This increase in androgen receptors increases the influence of testosterone, which further increases your confidence and your eagerness to tackle future challenges. When you have a series of small victories, the boost in your confidence can last for months.

4. They Speak With Certainty

It's rare to hear the truly confident utter phrases such as "Um," "I'm not sure," and "I think." Confident people speak assertively because they know that it's difficult to get people to listen to you if you can't deliver your ideas with conviction.

5. They Exercise

A study conducted at the Eastern Ontario Research Institute found that people who exercised twice a week for 10 weeks felt

Eight Things That Set Truly Confident People Apart (cont'd)

more competent socially, academically, and athletically. They also rated their body image and self-esteem higher. Best of all, rather than the physical changes in their bodies being responsible for the uptick in confidence, it was the immediate, endorphin-fueled positivity from exercise that made all the difference. Schedule your exercise to make certain it happens, and your confidence will stay up.

6. They Dress for Success

Like it or not, how we dress has a huge effect on how people see us. Things like the color, cut, and style of the clothes we wear—and even our accessories—communicate loudly. But the way we dress also affects how we see ourselves. Studies have shown that people speak differently when they're dressed up compared to when they're dressed casually. To boost your confidence, dress well. Choose clothing that reflects who you are and the image you want to project, even if that means spending more time at the mall and more time getting ready in the morning.

7. They Are Assertive, Not Aggressive

Aggressiveness isn't confidence; it's bullying. And when you're insecure, it's easy to slip into aggressiveness without intending to. Practice asserting yourself without getting aggressive (and trampling over someone else in the process). You won't be able to achieve this until you learn how to keep your insecurities at bay, and this will increase your confidence.

8. They Get Right with the Boss

A troubled relationship with the boss can destroy even the most talented person's confidence. It's hard to be confident when your boss is constantly criticizing you or undermining your contributions. Try to identify where the relationship went wrong and decide whether there's anything you can do to get things back on track. If the relationship is truly unsalvageable, it may be time to move on to something else.

Bringing It All Together

Your confidence is your own to develop or undermine. It's the steadfast knowledge that goes beyond simply "hoping for the best." It ensures that you'll get the job done—that's the power of true confidence.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/eight-things-set-truly-confident-people-apart-dr-travis-bradberry/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning co-author of the #1 bestselling book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, and the cofounder of [TalentSmart](#), the world's leading provider of [emotional intelligence tests](#) and [training](#), serving more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries.

The 2 Rare Skills You Need to Be A Great Leader

At some time or another, most of us have experienced a boss, manager, or leader who made us feel recognized and valued. And as a result, we were able to do more than we ever thought we could.

More than anything else, that's the sign of a true leader—

someone who makes you feel, think, act beyond the limits you imagined to your own capabilities and capacity. What's more, they make you feel you are valued and that you're part of something bigger than yourself.

What skills do these leaders have that allow them to help others become their best? Fundamentally, there are only two. Even the first is far from common on its own, and because the second builds on the first, it's especially rare.

But here's the good news: rare as they are, they're attainable. You can learn them and practice them and master them, and go on to help and empower others to exceed their self-imposed limits.

First, great leaders have a strong foundation of self-awareness. All great leaders draw strength from a well-built foundation of self-awareness. To lead from within requires a comprehensive understanding of yourself. That includes the ability to identify your own strengths and weaknesses—in terms of skills, which you can leverage by hiring people who make up for your weak spots, and also in terms of emotional triggers. Managing these triggers requires a high level of emotional awareness, plus the knowledge of how to be adaptable and the willingness to alter your behavior to be an effective leader.

You have permission to be human—that is, sometimes flawed and vulnerable—but you

must never allow inner turmoil to wreak havoc upon those you lead.

True leaders understand that their attitudes toward themselves set the tone to which others respond.

Second, they have the single-mindedness to instill power within others. It's one thing to understand yourself and to be aware of who you are. But the highest leadership quality is knowing how to empower others. A true leader is able to inspire their team, to encourage them to go beyond excellence and accomplish far more than anyone expects of them—or than they expect of themselves. A good leader may take people where they want to go, but a great leader takes them where they don't necessarily want to go but ought to be.

A true leader doesn't create more followers; they create more leaders.

A good leader may ask, "Is this working for me?" But a great leader will ask, "Is this working for my people?"

Great leaders can change the world, but first they must learn to lead from within. It's only after they've developed that level of self-awareness that they can lead and others to greatness.

Lead from within: Leaders become great when they are able to find their inner power and use it to inspire, strengthen and empower others.

<https://www.lollydaskal.com/leadership/the-2-rare-skills-you-need-to-be-a-true-leader/>



JOB IMMUNITY

In order to survive and thrive in a job setting, you must have an inner core that is immune to getting caught up in all the craziness around you. Too many people allow their jobs to be THE THING in their lives. When that happens, it's easy to feel inundated, take things personally, and blow things out of proportion.

I'm not suggesting that you don't give your all in a job or professional setting. It's important that your superiors understand that you're a conscientious employee who cares and can be relied upon to work hard and get the job done. What I am saying is don't let the job get all of you. At a deep personal level, you've got to know that there are more important things in life. You don't advertise this at your work setting, and you don't put any less effort in, but you work smarter.

Many people don't realize that perspective and the ability to perform at your best are closely related. When you're able to appropriately detach yourself you're not straining and letting yourself get overwhelmed. You demonstrate more wisdom and restraint in responding to the situations you have to deal with. You can focus and concentrate on one thing at a time. You don't get yourself immersed in counterproductive things that you can't control, and you don't participate in any negativity that may be around you.

There will always be some people around us that operate out of fear or insecurity and are constantly trying to prove their worth (though they wouldn't admit this). These folks are not only living in an unhealthful manner, but they're not functioning at their

full capacity, because it is just an exhausting way to live. They are not good role models, and we shouldn't allow ourselves to compete with them for attention. We must remind ourselves that calm, relaxed, gentle people can also be super achievers.

An easy analogy is the world of sports. Imagine you're a baseball player standing at home plate waiting to swing at the pitch. If you're tense, and if you think this at bat is a referendum on you, then you're in trouble, because you'll be so overanxious that you won't react effectively to the pitch. Baseball players seem to be constantly telling themselves that it's a game, it's not life and death and there will be a life after the sport passes them by. They realize the link between perspective and performance.

If you'd like to develop more of a defense wall so your inner core is immune to getting caught up in external situations, ask yourself what is really important in life. Remind yourself that this is not life and death and there will be a life after this job. Cancer survivors grasp this. Remind yourself that, chances are, you'll have a job, if not a few, after this one. Lastly, remember that if this were your last day on the job, somehow, somehow, they would find a way to survive without you. No one is irreplaceable.

What's the best thing to do? Do your best each day and go home, leaving your job at the job. What's the most important thing? Peace of mind. Why? Because life is short and we don't know how many moments we have left.

© 2018 Kevin Stacey-excerpted from the soon to be released book "*MindRight: Navigate the Noise*" by Kevin Stacey

4 THINGS HIGH PERFORMERS DO THAT OTHERS NEGLECT

High performance isn't an accident.

#1. Plan it:

I have a friend who transformed his body from jelly to steel. He doesn't simply show up at the gym. He plans his workouts. He knows tomorrow is cardio day. He knows the day after tomorrow is biceps and back.

Plan your development.

If you don't know what you're working on, you're beating the wind.

#2. Practice it:

You don't get better by leading. You get better when you practice leadership behaviors.

If you aren't practicing, you aren't improving.

A golfer goes to the putting green to practice one thing – putting. To be specific, she might practice her grip, while she putts.

1. How many ways could you begin a meeting?
2. How many strategies could you try to fuel energy or create clarity?

Tip: Practice one behavior at a time.

(Read: *Mastery* by Robert Green.)

#3. Watch it:

Determine what you want to improve and watch experts do it.

I don't sit backstage before or after I speak at conferences. I sit in the audience and watch speakers. I'm watching for style and technique, not content.



1. How do they begin?
2. What helps them connect?
3. What types of stories do they tell?

Intentionally hone your skills in order to reach your

potential. If not, you fall into unproductive habits that feel comfortable, but sabotage growth.

#4. Track it:

High performers don't simply work hard. They track key behaviors and performance indicators.

Go to the gym and look for the person who's carrying a small notebook. They know how many reps they've done. They know how far they went on the treadmill last week.

1. How many affirmations did you give yesterday?
2. How many times did you ask a follow-up question?
3. What self-reflection questions are you asking at the end of the day?

<https://leadershipfreak.blog/2019/02/15/4-things-high-performers-do-that-low-performers-neglect/>